

Luke 2:1-20

Some years ago the Family Circus comic strip showed the family walking down the sidewalk past store windows at Christmas time. Christmas decorations were everywhere. One sign read: Let's Make This Christmas the Best Christmas Ever! The father said to his family, "Aren't they forgetting about the first Christmas?"

And though we admire his words and appreciate the wisdom behind them, might I suggest to you that the sign, actually, was quite correct. What I mean is that Christmas 2005 is just as good as the very first Christmas. Not because of how nicely we decorate our trees and houses. Not because of how well we sing the Christmas carols or how many "Merry Christmases" we give out to our friends and neighbors. Rather, each and every Christmas is just as wonderful as the first Christmas for one simple reason—the Christ who is lying in the manger is the same Christ who comes to us today. The word spoken by the angel to the shepherds is the same word which came to your ears tonight. The shepherds have nothing on us. We don't have to think, "Oh, I wish that I had been there!" We are there! The Child, who was God in the flesh that they worshiped that night, is present in the flesh with us today. And tomorrow, as we come up to His manger, we not only behold Him which is Christ the Lord, He gives His flesh to us for our salvation.

Think of it this way. What is it that makes Christmas special? As Christians we know that without Christ, Christmas is nothing. Jesus is the reason for the season. And Jesus is here with us tonight just as much as He was present on the first Christmas. If Christ makes Christmas wonderful, then whenever and wherever Jesus is proclaimed as the Savior born for you, and His flesh is given for the life of the world, that place is no different than a lowly stable in Bethlehem some 2,000 years ago.

And something else which makes Christmas today no different than the first Christmas is that without faith in God's promise, Christmas is little more than tinsel and cookies. When the shepherds arrived at the stable they saw nothing they had not seen before. They saw a mother and her baby. There was no shiny halo glowing around the baby's head. There was no mist of heaven-scent in the air. They saw a mother and a child, that's all. But that was enough, because that's what God's angel said they would see.

The remarkable thing about what they saw is that they saw with faith. They believed what they had been told about this baby. This was God in the flesh. This, this is Christ the King, the Savior who would be pierced for me, for you. And from that moment on their lives were changed. God had kept His word. He who would deliver mankind from Satan's bondage had come. They were shepherds, but the Good Shepherd who would lead them to heaven, and be for us, the Way and the Door into heaven, now dwells with men.

What do you see tonight? A handful of people gathered together in a house decorated for this holy season? Yes, but more. For God's Word makes this house, the House of Bread—Bethlehem—where Christ still comes to His people through His living Word. And without faith you will see no more than the shepherd saw. Without faith you will see bread as bread and wine as wine. Without faith the words of Luke 2 are just words—lovely words, but no more than just words.

Christ is here as He was on the first Christmas. But to see Him you must close your eyes. For in the word of the angel we see Him. In the bread and wine we behold Him. He is in the water splashing in the baptismal font. He is in the pronouncement of sins that are forgiven. For this truly is why He came. And this is why He is here with us. He came for the shepherds. And He came for every sinner. He came for you. And this is still why He comes on a Christmas night such as this to a little church in a little town such as this. The best Christmas ever is the Christmas where God gives His Son to be the Savior of sinners. And since that is happening right now for you, yes you—God, now, not sometime later, but now forgives you of every sin because Jesus is here in the living Word for you. That makes this Christmas as wonderful as any other—even the first Christmas. A blessed Christmas to you for Jesus' sake. Amen.